

# THE CEA CRITIC

Formerly THE NEWS LETTER of the College English Association

University Library

Vol. XII — No. 1

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January, 1950

## University Of Vermont Symposium on American Novel

I. The Symposium was the direct outgrowth of the first year's work of a new and, I believe, unique course in Current Literary Criticism which I have conducted at the University of Vermont since 1948 and which is designed to explore intensively both the best critical writing and the most important American novels produced during the last thirty or forty years. The course is planned in such a way that the students are introduced, first, to the study of modern critical techniques and, second, to methods of applying those techniques to the close analysis and evaluation of the novels. They are trained in the writing of independent critical essays and they are encouraged to develop a perspective on the life and literature of the present age which will enable them to judge its problems and to understand some of the factors behind the generally low quality of the fiction now being produced.

(Continued on page 4, col. 1)

## Southern California Fall Meeting University of Redlands

The second annual meeting of the Southern California regional division of the College English Association was held at the University of Redlands on Saturday, November 5, 1949.

The president, Dr. Percy H. Houston of Occidental College opened the meeting with greetings to the fifty-one delegates present, followed by the appointment of Dr. Kenneth Kurz of Occidental College and Dr. Charles W. Cooper of Whittier College as a nominating committee to report at the afternoon sessions. He then introduced the speaker of the morning, Dr. Charles W. Cooper of Whittier College, author of *Arts and Humanity*, 1947.

Dr. Cooper's topic, "The Teaching of Poetry to Undergraduate Students," was a plea for understanding the personal needs of undergraduate students—emotional, financial, physical, and social—and the need for establishing a relationship between these needs and our use of poetry. He urged,

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## IN APPRECIATION

Robert Fitzhugh's secretaryship of the Association has been marked by growth, a series of fruitful conferences in states and regions, and of national meetings which have been pleasant, significant, and instructive. While the other officers have presided and in various ways done their part, the execution of plans and to a degree their development has been the work of Professor Fitzhugh. Thanks to his editorship, *The CEA Critic* has been lively and readable. For his successful conduct of all of these activities the Association owes him thanks, the work having been done with a good spirit and friendliness which have made it a real pleasure to collaborate with him.

Gordon Keith Chalmers

President, College English Association

## On Requesting

### And Receiving Dues

The annual dues letter has gone out, and the returns are reassuring. Your new executive secretary could have thought of more congenial ways in which to introduce himself, officially, to the membership. The good spirit which has accompanied the returns has been gratifying.

If you have not received your copy of the dues letter, let us know, and we'll see that you get one. A few envelopes somehow went through the addressographer without getting any imprint beyond a long black line.

Enclosed with the annual dues and subscription letter was a copy of a past issue of *THE CRITIC* together with a C.E.A. membership blank. Judging from enquiries, this enclosure has been misunderstood. It was NOT a mistaken substitute for a copy of the current issue of *THE CRITIC*.

It was intended for some colleague, at present not a C.E.A. member, who, through this sample copy, might become interested in joining.

It is a means of inviting each present member to become part of one big C.E.A. Membership Committee!

Additional membership blanks and copies of *THE CEA CRITIC* will be gladly furnished on request.

## Spring Regional Meetings

### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

(President, Dr. Albert W. Upton, Whittier College)

Place: Pasadena City College Library

Time: Saturday, March 25

### MIDDLE ATLANTIC

(President, C. L. Lewis, United States Naval Academy.)

Place: United States Naval Academy, Annapolis.

Time: Saturday, April 15

Luncheon Speaker: Dr. Louis B. Wright, Director, Folger Library. Subject: "The Vitality of Shakespeare."

### NEW YORK STATE

(President, George M. Kahrl, Elmira College.)

Place: Cornell University

Time: Saturday, April 22

C.E.A. to participate in Wordsworth Celebration at Cornell, April 20, 21, and 22

### NEW ENGLAND

(President, Morse Allen, Trinity College.)

Place: Yale University

Time: Saturday, May 6

Program Chairman: Norman Pearson

### INDIANA

(President, George S. Wykoff, Purdue University.)

Place: University of Indiana

Time: May 12 and 13

### SOUTHEASTERN

### PENNSYLVANIA

(President, Francis C. Mason, Gettysburg College.)

Place: Lafayette College

## MAR 6 1950 Question Marks Directions in the American Novel Today I. A Backward Look

Let me begin by calling your attention to a few dates and titles. Between 1920 and 1940 there is no doubt that the American novel was flourishing and that it was "going places". Take the year 1925. In that one year were published *The Great Gatsby*, *An American Tragedy*, *Manhattan Transfer* and *Arrowsmith*, not to mention *Porgy*, *Dark Laughter*, and *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. Theodore Dreiser had reached the culmination of his career of applying boldly naturalistic methods to intimately American themes. Sinclair Lewis had followed up *Main Street* and *Babbalanza*—shrill satires on provincialism and commercialism—with his one serious attempt to represent a useful citizen and devoted professional man, Fitzgerald, after his sensational success, *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned* (the jazz age shown through the eyes of one of its collegiate participants) had come forward with a sternly objective and critical treatment of the same subject. John Dos Passos was following up his war novel, *Three Soldiers*, with the first of his four great collectivistic canvases.

Or suppose we take the ten-year period from 1929 to 1938. We have here half a dozen of the great novels of Faulkner, including *The*

(Continued on page 5, col. 2)

## New England C. E. A. Fall Meeting Boston University

One hundred and forty-five delegates, representing about fifty institutions attended the fall conference of the New England College English Association, held October 29, at the College of Practical Arts and Letters, Boston University, and at the Hotel Lenox.

Outgoing President Walter Simmons (Rhode Island State College) announced the election of the following to office: president, Maxwell H. Goldberg (University of Massachusetts); first vice president, Morse Allen (Trinity College); second vice president, Alan Moffat

(Continued on page 7, col. 2)

## THE CEA CRITIC

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## Editor

MAXWELL H. GOLDBERG

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ROBERT T. FITZHUGH

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ASSOCIATION

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## Your Rage I Defy

Thanks, Bob, for your rousing send-off in the December issue. I would be worried about that valedictory so long! if I thought it meant adieu. But your double dare—or double threat—reassures me. It means you'll have to hang around awhile—if only as a minatory ghost, to haunt me.

Actually, since your official retirement, you have given me so much help. I know your "so long" means merely a kind of C.E.A. vacation or sabbatical *au revoir*.

And you certainly have earned a sabbatical—from the relentless daily (and, as I have already found out, nightly!) grind of C.E.A. routine and the pressures of C.E.A. growth. For four years you have been advancing C.E.A. frontiers, establishing outposts, and consolidating gains already made; and it is time for a richly merited furlough.

You yourself have been too modest and reticent to publicize what you have done for C.E.A., but now it can—and will—be told, or at least suggested.

You took over what, because of the War, had become partly organizational chaos and partly sheer vacuum; and, almost single-handed you brought order out of this chaos and both a living body and a spirit where there had been just empty space.

Take the regional C.E.A. groups, for example. In the pre-war years,

there were three of them: Middle Atlantic, Virginia and North Carolina, and New England. Now we have three or four times that number, either established or about to start.

Two of these—the Middle Atlantic Group and the Virginia and North Carolina Group—got going, after the War, virtually under their own steam. All the others, you yourself stirred up; and meanwhile almost tripled the national C.E.A. membership to boot. Nor must we forget that most of this you did as an extra, imposed upon an already heavy schedule, and remorseless in its demands upon time that should have gone to family and to that essential of academic life—recreative leisure.

In short, however we measure, we find ourselves deeply in your debt. There is the yardstick of time, energy, and worry expended; that of office machinery set up and correspondence maintained; that of numbers of C.E.A. members attracted; that of regional groups established or re-activated; that of articles secured, and Chap Books and CRITICS published; of conferences arranged; programs built up and speakers booked; of invigorating addresses given (cf. the comment of Cecelia H. Hendricks—Indiana University: "I greatly enjoyed Mr. Fitzhugh's energetic talk at the Indiana College Teachers of English meeting at Purdue last spring."); of employers and employees brought together through the Appointment Bureau; of critical and professional causes pushed to the fore, vigorously agitated, and, in some instances, brought to issue in terms of action taken and changes made; of professional backbone stiffening through your own example of plainspoken analysis of academic idols, healthy scepticism of our academic gods, and exposure of academic shibboleths. Whichever of these gauges we adopt, we arrive at a very large sum-total of praise and gratitude due you.

It is so big a debt, we cannot begin to repay you. The most we can do now is to acknowledge it publicly.

As for me,—surely, coming into the rich heritage you have passed on to me, and still relying on you, as well as on the many others who already have told me they want to help, I have every reason to add optimism to my admiration and gratitude for the work you have done.

Your double dare, Robert Fitzhugh, I take up. Your rage I defy. Your god-speed I cherish.

## Ring the Wrong Bell

Mr. Jacobs in his article *Danger in the Night* (CEA Critic, December, 1949) warns that sectioning freshmen according to ability in first-year English is harmful to instructors, harmful to students, and harmful to society. That is fairly widespread harm, and I suppose that those of us who are participating in this sort of academic criminality ought to look into the matter.

I do not doubt that instructors who draw what Mr. Jacobs calls "the discards" are less happy than they would be with face cards. Furthermore, I believe that the same instructor should not always be required to pick up the discards. He should occasionally be dealt nothing below a queen.

As for the students, Mr. Jacobs admits that those assigned to upper sections are happy enough. He visualizes, however, the average and below-average students panting for the company of their superiors. This may be a true assessment of the situation; if so, Notre Dame ought to schedule Slippery Rock in football, Menuhin should play a duet with Jack Benny, and Finland should attack Russia. Grossly uneven competition is of dubious value to anyone, for obviously Slippery Rock would repent ever having heard of football; Benny would be undiscouraged but would not play any better; and Finland would vanish from the map. The object of sectioning is to provide something like even competition. Bright students may step up the wattage in some instances; in others, they are as likely to blow out the candles.

If Mr. Jacobs, the Bellman, has tapped the wrong bell twice, he has at least made sounds that have been heard before and that may serve as a legitimate warning to those who, for his reasons and their own, do not like sectioning anyway. His third argument—number one in his list—is original, I hope. He argues that sectioning according to ability is a form of "segregation", the same sort of segregation which, when applied to minority creeds in the outside world, becomes "an offense both to democracy and to religion." He says: "Promoting our forms of segregation within our courses accustoms us and our students alike to accept segregation as a legitimate and excusable treatment wherever we find it." Shades of the ghetto and Jim Crow!

Obviously Mr. Jacobs does not go far enough by half. Colleges and universities represent in them-

selves forms of segregation and, one must assume, are an offense. Faculties are particularly offensive in this respect. Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and other scholastic honor societies are forms of segregation that, I suppose, smell to high heaven. Indeed, and to be short about this, any grouping of any persons for any reasons is but one step short of the Ku Klux Klan and an orgy of pogroms. There is only one trouble as I see it: normally it is the majority that beats up on the minority; I don't see how we are going to reverse this rule and have the five percent that we segregate in our freshman English mistreat the other ninety-five per cent—not and get their studying done, too.

Kenneth Knickerbocker  
University of Tennessee

## Norman Foerster Honored

For a second year, past C.E.A. president Norman Foerster, is visiting professor at Duke University, giving a graduate course in the English romantic period. Last spring he was elected an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa by the Duke chapter, and was given an honorary degree (D. Litt.) by the University of North Carolina.

## CRITIC Supplement

THE CRITIC is pleased to present, in cooperation with the University of Massachusetts, and as a supplement to the January issue, Ernest Bernbaum's address: "What Does the Nature of Literature Require of Its Interpreters?"

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## Compensatory Corrective

As the first issue by your new editor goes to press, he views the results with misgiving. Generally, however, this is what he hopes for: in the eight issues making up a given annual volume, to maintain a good over-all batting average. He hopes that the extremes—regional, topical, personal—of one issue may be offset by compensatory correctives in other issues; and that the net results will be a balance among the various interests and emphases of the C.E.A.

But if this aim is to be reached, a steady flow must be maintained of potential CRITIC copy coming in from the regional sources. Regional officers—especially program chairmen—can help very much. How? By encouraging the professional talent in their area to produce pieces worthy of national circulation; and, by seeing to it that these pieces, once regionally produced and presented, are sent in to THE CRITIC. This takes a great deal of patience, tact, and firmness. Sometimes it means giving free rein. Sometimes it means riding herd.

Deepening and extending the channels of vital communication between regional sources and the central reservoir of THE CRITIC will greatly enrich our publication and benefit us all.

Announcing . . .

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University of Richmond

N. H. Henry did research last summer and prepared material for publication on Milton. Dr. Henry worked at the University of North

## I've Been Reading

Book Review Editor

J. Gordon Eaker

Jersey City Junior College

[Note: The book-review editor would like the names of members interested in receiving new books for brief reviews, not longer than 150 words. Unsolicited reviews, equally brief, are invited of new or old books of likely interest to members.]

Two useful scholarly handbooks have come out this fall, Harold H. Watts' *The Modern Reader's Guide to the Bible* (Harper, 524 pp., \$3.75), and John D. Cooke and Lionel Stevenson's *English Literature of the Victorian Period* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 438 pp., \$3).

Mr. Watts' book reflects long and thorough study and teaching of the Bible as literature with its chapters on how to read the Bible, differences in literary methods and aims, and comparisons with modern literature. His detailed comments on all the books, with chronological charts, should add much to every reader's understanding of Biblical history, poetry, prophecy, and gospels. The Apocryphal books are discussed, and historical backgrounds are supplied. Any teacher should find it a helpful reference work, but in addition it reads well as a straight narrative commentary.

The Cooke and Stevenson handbook, a companion to McKillop's on the eighteenth century, is noteworthy for the sense of reality which it gives to the politics of the Victorian period, the dominating personality of the Queen, and the clear and comprehensive essays which sum up many books on the science, religion, fine arts, book publishing, and newspapers and magazines of the period. The complete and recent bibliographies should be especially useful to teachers and scholars in this period; and the brief essays on all major contributors to poetry, fiction, drama, expository prose, and criticism make it an excellent introductory handbook for students.

J. Gordon Eaker

Carolina.

R. M. Baine continued his work on the novels of Thomas Holcroft at Harvard.

Lawrence A. Wood, Jr. did a research seminar study on "Some Aspects of Tragedy in the Verse Plays of Maxwell Anderson" under the direction of Dr. Arthur F. White of Western Reserve University, Cleveland.

## BULLETIN BOARD

Newspapers of January 14 carried an item concerning the inauguration that evening, in New Haven, Conn., of the Ruskin Society of America. The group was being organized in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Ruskin's "Seven Lamps of Architecture."

The following has been distributed among English Departments in New England:

The faculty and graduate students of the English Department of the University of Connecticut are in the process of forming a magazine to be called the *New England Review*. This magazine

## HINTS ON THE REGIONAL MEETING

"We've been going practically since 1934—have one meeting a year—primarily for getting acquainted and hearing a few papers. The pattern has more or less been set in the form of literary and scholarly papers on Friday afternoon, a dinner meeting with an out-of-state (nearby) speaker, and composition and teaching papers on Saturday morning. The officers serve only one year, except that the Vice President moves up."

George S. Wykoff  
Purdue University  
President, Indiana C.E.A.

My immediate suggestion would be to have a number of similar sessions or group meetings which could lend themselves to the particular interests of the members, not trying to drag everyone into one or two large meetings where the topics of general interest are so difficult to find.

I was particularly impressed by a program such as was given at the Harvard conference of the New England College English Association, where helps in teaching and in presenting particular works of literature to students were taken up.

Norman Pearson  
Yale University  
N. E. Regional Director

Let's hear how other groups handle their regional meetings. C.E.A. prides itself on its decentralization, flexibility, and adaptability. Yet even such individualistic regional groups as ours may learn from one another. After all, there's more than one way to skin a rabbit!

National C.E.A. Director Ernest E. Leisy, Southern Methodist University, is at work on the program for the annual Texas Conference of College Teachers of English, to be held in March. The program probably will include a round-up on Freshman English in the forenoon and one on teaching of literature in the afternoon.

George S. Wykoff (Purdue), president of the Indiana College English Association, is Secretary of the newly organized Conference on College Composition and Communication (N.C.T.E.). The spring meeting will be held at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25. Planned are three general sessions; fourteen workshops on aspects of administration, curriculum, and teaching; and three discussion meetings, for those not attending workshops, on individualization of training, audio-visual aids, and group dynamics. Attendance is open to every one interested in composition and communication.

will be an outlet for critical and creative writing in this area.

We here feel that the existing "little" magazines fail to include a newly developing attitude toward literature which must find expression. We hope the *New England Review* will give aid and impetus to this expression. We further hope that the review will be an additional channel for poetry, fiction, and criticism which cannot, because of existing canons, find a market.

We wish to have all English Departments in colleges and universities in New England participate to the fullest extent in this endeavor, and we seek the cooperation of all interested parties not only in the contribution of manuscripts, but also in the editorial functioning of the magazine.

The Editorial Board  
Box 816  
Storrs, Connecticut

622720

## Vermont Symposium . . .

(Continued from page 1, col. 1)

A. As the course progressed through its first year, the class and I began to appreciate the complexity of the problems facing the modern novelist and to see the tremendous need for a larger and more intelligent understanding of them than they had hitherto received. It seemed to us particularly necessary that there should exist in this country a truly authoritative body of prose criticism which would act on the current novel much as the New Criticism has acted on poetry, and which would serve to stimulate our novelists in their struggle to maintain sound literary standards at a time when they are being constantly tempted, goaded, threatened, and attacked by the anti-literary forces in power.

(1) Our ideas on this point might be stated in the form of the following propositions:

a. The admirable equipment for technical analysis which has been perfected by the New Criticism group has been used by them up to now almost exclusively in the interpretation of poetry. The distinguished teacher and critic, Professor Henri Peyre, in his book *Writers and their Critics* as well as in his contribution to the Johns Hopkins Symposium on Criticism, has much to say about this isolation of the modern critic from the prose literature of his own time: "the high-brow reviews published in academic communities (writes Professor Peyre) are so intent upon elaborating their critical methods and refining the psycho-

logical jargon for designating mysterious organic, ironic, and metaphorical devices of past poetry that they forget to publish articles discovering and appraising the poetry and prose which, an unheard melody around them, begs for a sensitive audience."

b. Whatever are the reasons for this preoccupation of the New Critics with poetry, the result is that a gap has been created between the wisest and most authoritative American criticism and the best as well as the worst American prose fiction. With the critics con-

## AMBIVALENCE

Peeking into college faculties is a very interesting activity, and teaching college English and secondary school English simultaneously is certainly very revealing.

—W. H. Dole  
Hillyer College

centrating more and more on poetic analysis, fiction in this country has been left to the mercy of the reviewer and literary columnist, neither of whom has been noted for powers of penetrating evaluation.

c. The main and most urgent task of criticism today, therefore, is to bring to bear upon the prose writing of the immediate present principles and techniques closely similar to those which have been developed by the new critics for poetry, with an aim to producing a truly authoritative criticism of prose.

d. If this can be done successfully, it may be possible to replace the present ill-defined and largely impressionistic judgments of the reviewer with sound standards by which the quality of fiction may be measured. An eventual result might be that the tastes of the American reading audience would be improved and that our novelists, assured of an enlightened reception of their work, would be inspired or compelled to consider once again their responsibilities as artists.

B. It was with these ideas in mind that I began making plans for the symposium, in the hope that out of a serious discussion of the present state of the American novel would emerge not only information and opinions of value in arriving at a judgment of the literary situation today, but also a possible working method of placing before critics, as well as before the public at large, an argument for a greater critical attentiveness to the whole field of contemporary fiction.

II. The symposium was organized to develop organically from the statements of the background and nature of the main problem, which were made in lectures given by members of the staff, to the informal discussion sessions which were held at intervals between the lectures and intended to explore more thoroughly the points made in them. Most of the important issues pertaining to the current novel were raised in the lectures and, inevitably, so were many irrelevant ones.

A. On the opening day, Dorothy Canfield Fisher presented one of the many problems of the novelist in a lecture on "The use of personal experience as subject-matter for fiction." Maxwell Geismar followed with a discussion of "The Development of the American Novel in the 1920's and 30's". Malcolm Cowley spoke on the novels of World War II and compared them with those produced after World War I; John P. Marquand presented another novelist's problem in his lecture on "The Construction of a Novel"; Roger Burlingame spoke on the relations of the author and publisher; Henry Seidel Canby on "The effect of the book clubs on fiction"; John A. Kousser on the development of two current literary tendencies, symbolism and what he called pseudo-journalism; and Clifton Fadiman on "Book Reviewing as Literary Criticism." All of these issues and many more, including the whole problem of commercialism and standardization, the contrasting effects of the two wars on literature, the recent decline of technical experimentation in prose and the increase of journalistic writing, the very complicated subject of literary value, myth, symbol, and convention, the function of the little magazine, and so on, were argued at considerable length during the discussion periods.

B. I should like to be able to say that every problem of the current American novel was exhaustively explored during the symposium and that a pat diagnosis and cure for each was successfully formulated. But I shall have to say instead that far more issues were raised than were finally or even tentatively settled and that there was much material which had to be deferred to our next session next summer. This is partly a weakness that is inherent in all discussions in which widely diverging points of view about a single subject are presented. But there was, in our own case, another factor as well.

(a) It struck me, as I listened to these distinguished men and women lecture and later as I worked directly with them as moderator of their discussions, that for writers whose entire lives had been deeply involved in the problems of literature they seemed oddly remote from the dilemma which they had come together to analyse. It was as if they were all, in one way or another, either consciously or unconsciously, avoiding the real issues, carefully skirting the deli-

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cate points, and falling back again and again on the comfortable ground of hazy platitude and empty optimism. I do not mean to imply that they were trying deliberately to escape the truth. It was rather that some obstacle seemed to intrude itself between them and the truth, so that over and over again one had the feeling that if only this or that idea were carried a bit farther illumination would soon burst upon us and the truth would be revealed.

I was puzzled by this apparent failure for some time, until it occurred to me that it was showing itself to be rooted in one common unwillingness, an unwillingness to draw the natural inferences from a set of facts. Malcolm Cowley, for example, in comparing the novels of the two wars, observed that many of the novels of World War II had parts that are so much alike that they might be interchanged at will. Since this is not true of the novels of World War I the inference might be that the novels of World War II are less individualized and are written in a less idiosyncratic style, leading to the

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conclusion that poets, at least in respect to style, they are, as a group, distinctly different from, and undoubtedly inferior to, those of the first war. But Mr. Cowley did not draw that inference. Like most of the others, he refrained from generalizing, even when the generalization was perfectly safe, and contented himself with the presentation of fact.

Such reticence in a group of established writers, some of whom have professional affiliations which limit their freedom of statement, is understandable and even, under many circumstances, commendable. It indicates a scientific caution and an intelligence accustomed to viewing all sides of an argument. But I believe that it is an unhealthy tendency at a time when we need as never before to speak out passionately about literary problems and to be willing to take a stand even if the ground we stand on has not been thoroughly tested. For it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers facing literature today is scientific relativism with its demand for exhaustive analysis and its fear of prejudice, intuition and passion—all those qualities which have energized the great literature, yes, and even the great criticism, of the past. We have arrived at a condition in which all problems can be thought out of existence, in which we will discard every theory that cannot be made to fit the last scrap of evidence we bring before it. Today it is possible for a magazine of the calibre of *The Saturday Review of Literature* to devote an

entire issue to the ostensible analysis of current literary trends without daring to come forward with a single concrete suggestion as to what those trends specifically are. Mr. Bernard DeVoto, writing in that issue, was able to find so many tendencies in current literature that seemed to contradict one another that he left the reader with the distinct impression that there is nothing whatever that can safely be said about the tendencies of current literature. It is this state of mind which I deplore, and I hope that in subsequent symposia on the current American novel at the University of Vermont and elsewhere it will gradually be dispelled. —John Aldridge

(To be concluded in February issue.)

of the work of Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the beginning work of Robert Penn Warren in *Night Rider*. (If we were including short story in our survey, we should have to mention *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, short stories by Katherine Ann Porter which appeared in 1939.) 1940 saw the culmination of Hemingway's work in the novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; the last one of Wolfe's series, *You Can't Go Home Again*, following his death. And along with Faulkner's *The Hamlet* and Caldwell's *Trouble in July*, it saw the appearance of three notable novels by new hands: Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Oxbow Incident*.

#### MICE . . . OR MEN?

*My one complaint is that most of the articles are too general, as if the authors were trying hard to avoid being specific. I read circumlocutions about goals in freshman English, and I skip through learned evasions about world literature. Most of the material seems to picture the scurrying of mice that never find the hole.*

*It seems to me that too many of the articles are low-powered narcotics instead of shots in the brain. They take too long to start, and they say too little on the way to the end.*

Sincerely,

Walter Mansikis  
De Paul University

#### Directions in American . . .

(Continued from page 1, col. 4)

*Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Absalom Absalom!* We have from Hemingway *A Farewell to Arms* and many volumes of short stories; from Wolfe, the first two of his tetralogy: *Look Homeward Angel* and *Of Time and the River*; from Dos Passos, all three novels of the trilogy, *U.S.A.*; from Farrell the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy and several of the later autobiographical series; from Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, *God's Little Acre*, *Journeysman*; from Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*; from Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown*, *In Dubious Battle*, *Tortilla Flat*. In addition to these headlines, we have a big flood of so-called proletarian novels. And besides all these we have assorted works by other writers of much more than ordinary power,—Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Evelyn Scott, Pearl Buck, Margaret Kinnan Rawlings, Kay Boyle, John O'Hara, John Marquand, George Santayana, Vardis Fisher, T. S. Stribling, Louis Bromfield.

The years 1939 and 1940 are interesting and, as we might call them, pivotal, as seeing the publication of culminating work by some of the old guard and beginning work by writers who herald the new crop. 1939 saw the peak

Now, it may be significant that no one of these three gifted writers has followed up his initial success with another novel of comparable power or distinction. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* is a tremendously fine piece of autobiography, bearing the same relation to his novel as Dreiser's autobiographical books to his novels; but it is not a work of fiction. Walter Clark's *City of Trembling Leaves* is a story of considerable charm; but I do not think it can take its place among the really strong works of fiction in our day. Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* is hardly more than a bit of detail from her larger canvas, and her *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is more an interesting experiment in surrealism than anything else.

The years that follow 1940 have seen the publication of some novels by veterans, notably Faulkner; some very feeble work by veterans, notably Lewis, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, and Marquand. Fitzgerald's account was closed posthumously with the publication of his unfinished *The Last Tycoon*. Hervey Allen has started his big series of historical novels, with, first, *The Forest and the Fort*; but I doubt whether he will take his place with Walter Scott or Sigrid Undset in this genre. James J. Cain has started a genre of hard-pan

recital with, I fancy, limited possibilities—though I believe he does, as the French say, *faire école*—make a considerable following for himself. Henry Miller has certainly made a great following for himself among the young intellectuals on the Pacific coast. It is as much as anything a school of living, imported from the American bohemia in Paris. Much of what he writes is prophecy and reportage. His novels are hard to come by owing to our postal regulations: I have read but one of them, and here again, I can't say whether he is likely to become a genuinely germinal force in fiction, though he is sure to be a good field for psychoanalysis.

A number of highly gifted short-story writers have made their appearance in the last decade—most notable, perhaps, Eudora Welty. But outside of a few war novels and the works of Robert Warren, I don't happen to know of much work in the novel of the first quality. The one exception may be Ira Wolfert. His *Tucker's People* (1943) is a formidable and frightening study of the numbers racket, and he is most unusually skillful in two ways: the discreet rendering of certain dialects, such as that of Jewish merchants, and his power of building up, without sensationalism, an atmosphere of anxiety and terror.

The list of distinguished novels for this last decade would appear to be a very short one compared with that we can produce for the preceding ten-year period. One hesitates to venture confident gen-

(Continued on page 6, col. 1)

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## Directions in American . . .

(Continued from page 5, col. 4)

eralizations as to the directions actually taken by the American novel within recent years, and still more to make prediction as to the directions it is going to take in the near future. Perhaps one can speak a little more confidently of the causes of the present ambiguity of outlook.

\* \* \*

And here again I want to call your attention to two more significant dates. The first is 1934, year of publication of a book by Malcolm Cowley; the second is 1941, year of publication of a novel by the European writer, Arthur Koestler. In *Exile's Return* Cowley undertakes to give an idea of the circumstances that determined the attitudes and philosophy of the so-called Lost Generation. This was the generation of writers who, in high school, were set apart from others by their sense of the literary vocation. They read Shaw and Mencken and developed the art of paradox, or never saying the expected. In college they read Goethe and Rimbaud, and were never taught to see the relation between culture and the industrial sources of wealth e.g. in Boston and Cambridge. They were already thoroughly uprooted — *dépaycé* — and they spent the rest of their lives nostalgically seeking an equivalent within themselves for the old home feeling of Pennsylvania, Nebraska or Kentucky. In the ambulance corps in France and Italy they made no responsible contact with the world of reality; they came home thoroughly disillusioned. Most of them stayed abroad for a few years cultivating the religion of art-for-art's sake—reading Mallarmé and Joyce and Eliot and Louis Aragon, writing for *Transition* and the *Transatlantic Review*, allying themselves with Dada and surrealism. They found no solid satisfaction in all this. They came back to Greenwich Village and wrote for *Broom* and other such uncommercial little magazines; and then adjourned to unproductive Connecticut farms. They were still lost and uprooted.

Before 1930, according to Cowley, few of them were interested in politics. But they were extreme individualists, rebels against the established order, which they felt to be unfavorable to creative artists. "Some thing oppressed them," says Cowley, "some force was preventing them from doing their best work. They did not understand its nature, but they tried to exorcise it by giving it

names—it was the stupidity of the crowd, it was hurry and waste, it was the falseness of polite conventions, it was Mass Production, Babbitry, our Business Civilization—perhaps it was the Machine, which had been developed to satisfy men's needs, but which was now controlling those needs and forcing its standardized products upon us by means of omnipresent advertising and omnipresent vulgarity—the Voice of the Machine, the Tyranny of the Mob." They

of the exploited underdog.

Well, Upton Sinclair had written of the Chicago Slaughter houses in *The Jungle*, 1906; of the Colorado coal strike in *King Coal*, 1917; of the Harding oil scandals in *Oil*, 1927; of the Sacco-Vanzetti scandal in *Boston*, 1928; and if he was more of a propagandist than an artist, he could show the way to better artists than himself. Sinclair Lewis had shown up the shallowness and vulgarity and falseness of the business promoter and

and the price of groceries, a small merchant bankrupt in the next block, a love affair broken off, a mortgage foreclosed, a manufacturer's rise to power—all these incidents take place in a historical pattern that is also illuminated by revolts in Spain, a new factory in the Urals, an obscure battle in the interior of China."

And many other writers fell into line, Caldwell, Farrell, even Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe, in his series of autobiographical novels, shows his romantic hero, his artist from the South, trying to storm the citadel of New York, struggling against the embattled philistinisms of our commercial civilization. One feels that he is somewhat at a loss how to resolve the personal problems of his hero except in terms of the society of his time, and that, somewhere along the way—impressed by the shallowness and the chaos of our industrial culture, and by its material collapse as exemplified in the crash of 1929 and the bank failures of the early thirties—Wolfe is converted to the socialist point of view: in his final volume (1940) he labors the social moral, *You Can't Go Home Again*. One is not satisfied that his solution quite meets the requirements of the case and that his final volume, which he did not live to revise, is as well done as the earlier ones. But it is no less eloquent of the way in which the writers of the time were captured by the social theme.

The case of Faulkner is much more complicated and hard to include under any simple formula.

(Continued on page 7, col. 4)

## WANTED

"In *THE CEA CRITIC*, an article on *TEACHING OF PLAY-WRITING*. It's still alas being taught in institutions without facilities for Theatre productions. The MSS submitted in our annual playwriting contest show that many authors have never been to the theatre—and some of these scripts came from colleges!"

N. Bryllion Fagin  
Johns Hopkins University

\* \* \*

"Since I have been teaching a dozen years, I know that no positive formula for giving freshman English exists, but I feel that a little more useful material, in *THE CRITIC*, on unusual methods would help. Further, the articles on comparative literature, a subject that admits of more philosophizing, could deal with specific motivations and approaches to the material taught."

Walter Maneikis  
De Paul University

\* \* \*

"We need a book from which to teach advanced composition to agricultural students. We have several for engineers, but these are dull for the 'Ags' because the examples are on a strange subject."

Rudolph Kirk  
Rutgers University

tried to escape into art, into the primitive, and some of them made their escape, such as it was, through drugs, through violence, through suicide.

It was the great depression following the crash of 1929 which finally came to show them a more satisfactory direction, according to Cowley. Writing in the early thirties, this editor of the *New Republic* considered that the way for these writers to escape from their sterilizing social isolation was to realize their solidarity with the social body. They must perforce take sides in the class struggle which was shaping up as the main social issue of that day. Cowley devoutly trusted that most of them would take sides with the workers. He did not wish them to write propaganda. For propaganda is conceived in the upper layer of consciousness, in a soil of hastily learned and ill-digested theory. But if they were to escape from the airless cell of their individualism they must deal with human nature and society as they felt it in the depths of their emotional nature. And this for most of them would result in books critical of our social order in the interest

the culture he represented, in *Babbitt*, 1922. Sherwood Anderson had written of the deadening effects of industrialization in an agricultural community in *Poor White*, 1920. Scott Fitzgerald, in *The Great Gatsby*, 1925, had shown up the criminal futility of the idle rich, and was to continue this tragic theme in *Tender is the Night*, published the same year as Cowley's book. Between 1930 and 1936 Dos Passos wrote the successive volumes of his *U.S.A.*, the most critical and the most comprehensive of pictures of our chaotic and heartless industrial culture. With the most ingenious, most modern and futuristic of technical devices, he shows how everything connects with everything else in our chaotic world, in spite of its apparent disorganization. He is the perfect example of the formula proposed by Cowley. "Once the writer knows and feels the struggles of the oppressed classes all over the world," says Cowley, "he has a way to get hold both of distant events and those near at hand, and a solid framework on which to arrange them. Two housewives gossiping upon the back porch about their husbands' jobs

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**So. California Meeting . . .**

(Continued from page 1, col. 1) with appropriate examples, the effort to bring whole poems to bear upon whole people, poems which present a full-blown human experience and which will possess the heart and mind and soul of the reader. Dr. Cooper advocated the assignment of only one poem at a time, or at most two or three; the stressing of the oral effects of language; the use of good recordings; the enlivening of the students' imagery; the encouragement of appropriate emotional responses; the bringing of the whole poem to trial—and all in terms of the relation to the needs of students.

Dr. Cooper's talk was followed by a lively discussion, after which the group adjourned to the Commons Dining Hall for lunch. The luncheon speaker was Dr. Ward S. Miller of the University of Redlands, who read a paper entitled "Masterpiece of the Third Edition," a discussion of sources and influences underlying Whitman's *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*.

The afternoon session convened at 2:30 with the business of the day. The report of the organizational meeting of October 30, 1948, was read by the secretary-treasurer, Miss Dorothy Dixon of Pasadena City College, and accepted by vote of those present. Since no provision had been made for dues to the local chapter, no treasurer's report was made. Dr. Houston then asked for suggestions for the place of holding the next meeting, and the invitation of the group from Pasadena City College was ac-

cepted. Next the nominating committee presented its report, and the following officers were elected unanimously:

President, Dr. Albert W. Upton  
Vice-president, Dr. A. Lionel Stevenson

Secretary-Treasurer, Miss Dorothy Dixon

Annual dues of \$1.00 to the local chapter were also voted and the suggestion was made that members who so desired pay an additional dollar for last year.

The new president, Dr. Upton, then introduced the speaker of the afternoon, Mr. H. Woodrow Ohlsen of Pasadena City College, who spoke on preparation in English of students entering freshman composition. He said that too many students have evidently been instructed in some of the rules of formal grammar but have little idea of the true function of writing. More high schools, he added, should emphasize that writing is a matter of developing ideas with a reader or listener in mind, and should discuss problems of clarity, effectiveness, and usage on the basis of student essays rather than through exercises in a handbook.

A lively discussion followed on the perennial subject of the teaching of grammar.

The meeting adjourned following an expression of appreciation to the University of Redlands for their hospitality and a vote to hold a spring meeting on a Saturday prior to the Easter vacation.

Dorothy Dixon

Pasadena City College

**N. E. C. E. A. . . .**

(Continued from page 1, col. 4) (Mount Holyoke); secretary-treasurer, Howard Bartlett (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); directors Daniel Aaron (Smith College), Genevieve Birk (Tufts College), John Ciardi (Harvard University), Roberta Grahame (Wellesley College), Elizabeth Lindsay (Hillyer College), Norman Pearson (Yale University), Alvan S. Ryan (Marlboro College).

It was voted to accept, with appreciation, an invitation from the Yale Department of English to hold the spring conference at Yale University.

Charles C. Parkhurst and George M. Sneath of Boston University headed the committee of the host University. Maxwell H. Goldberg was chairman of the program committee. Other members of the Conference Committee were: Joseph Brin and Robert Campbell, of Boston University; Floriana Tarantino, of the University of Massachusetts; and the officers and directors of the N.E.C.E.A., includ-

ing outgoing directors Franklin Norviah (Northeastern University); John Holmes (Tufts College); and G. Harris Daggett (University of New Hampshire).

The all-day conference opened with greetings from Pres. Daniel Marsh, of Boston University, who told association members that "the teaching of English is as important a service as it is conceivable to perform in the whole area of education."

The full program of the conference follows:

Session I, Joseph Warren Beach (Harvard University) "Directions in the American Novel Today". Luncheon (Hotel Lenox), Rollo Walter Brown, "On Writing the Biographical Portrait". Session II, Report, John Aldridge (University of Vermont), "First Annual Critical Symposium on the Current American Novel, held at the University of Vermont, August 1-6, 1949"; Edward Post (Boston University) "The New Criticism Contemplates the Fireworks on the Fifth of July" (An approach to literature through functional aesthetics). Session III, Chairman: Vernon P. Helming (University of Massachusetts); Edward Wagenknecht (Boston University), "Dickens and the Scandal-Mongers"; Richard Ellmann (Harvard University), "Field Trips of a Yeats Biographer". Dinner (Hotel Lenox), Alan McGee (Mount Holyoke College), "Academic Freedom and the College Teacher of English"; John Ciardi (Harvard University), "On Editing and Writing Poetry".

Discussion Participants: Angelo P. Bertocci (Boston University); Eric Carlson (University of Connecticut); Densil Bagster - Collins (Springfield College); Sprague W. Drenan (Keene Teachers' College); David P. Edgell (Simmons College); Anne Landauer (University of Connecticut); Sidney Kaplan (University of Massachusetts). List incomplete. CEA CRITIC Reporters: Chairman, Charles N. DuBois (University of Massachusetts); Leon Barron (University of Massachusetts); Leone Barron (Mount Holyoke College); Richard Bowler (Nichols Junior College); Eric Carlson (University of Connecticut); Doris Kirk Holmes (Wellesley College); Arthur Monk (Boston University); William Henry Moss (Boston University).

**THE KENYON****SCHOOL OF ENGLISH**

will hold its third session, June 22 to August 5, 1950. Information may be had from the Dean, Charles M. Coffin, School of English, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio.

**Directions in American . . .**

(Continued from page 6, col. 4)

For his main theme is the decay of aristocratic Southern society, for which he has a nostalgic admiration, and the causes of this lie far back in ante-bellum history and do not show us capitalism in its present-day form. But the causes are generically the same, involving as they do the commercial exploitation of a subject race. The evil of this system, complicated by all the horrors following on miscegenation, is obviously felt by him in all his work. And if we may take *The Bear* (dating from 1942) as at all representing his social point of view, we must regard him as one of the most radical of all our writers, since he would seem to condemn as evil all private property in land used for production, together with the financial system which implements such possession.

Meantime a large school of distinctly propagandist writers were turning out what were called "proletarian novels", dealing with strikes and labor disputes almost baldly from the working-class, if not positively the socialist, point of view. This school included writers as gifted as Halper, Cantwell, Fielding Burke, Grace Lumpkin, and Josephine Herbst. If no indubitable masterpieces came out of this movement before *The Grapes of Wrath*, this is evidence of nothing more than the extreme difficulty of making masterpieces out of party propaganda. But *The Grapes of Wrath* did represent the peak of the movement; it escaped the stigma of propaganda by virtue of the genuineness of Steinbeck's emotional attachment to working class types and under dogs—an attachment which many critics consider sentimental—and the vividness with which his imagination was caught by the plight of the Okies following the dust storms of the late thirties.

(The rest of this article by Joseph Warren Beach, will appear in our next issue.)

**Morse Allen****N. E. President**

Morse Allen, chairman of the English Department at Trinity College (Hartford, Conn.), has become president of the New England College English Association. He fills the vacancy created by Max Goldberg's resignation. Alan McGee, chairman of the English Department at Mount Holyoke College, is now first vice president of the N.E.C.E.A.

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SCRIBNERS

## Personal

Robert J. Conklin

Robert J. Conklin, regionally active in the C.E.A., and Librarian and Professor of English at Springfield College, died on or about December 25, 1949, in tragic circumstances. Led by his interest in problems of social and international understanding, he had accepted a Fulbright grant to teach for a year in the University of the Philippines, where he had previously served as head of the English department. During the Christmas vacation, he and his companion, a geographer from the University staff, while engaged in a scientific expedition into the little-known, mountainous region of Northern Luzon, were killed by bandits.

By his death Springfield College has lost an alumnus and a teacher of warm geniality and zest for living who combined to a marked degree its ideal of a man well-rounded in spirit, mind and body. A sports enthusiast, he was keenly interested in contemporary letters, and in the problems of teaching English, especially to foreign students. Prior to returning to Springfield College in 1936 he had taught English at Penn State, Purdue, and Muhlenberg Colleges.

—Denzil Bagster-Collins

According to an AP story of January 27, Professor Conklin and his companion were slain in a primitive Filipino tribal rite on Christmas Day. The new version of the slaying was told to James L. Meader, public affairs officer of the embassy, by investigators.

The two professors came along when crops were poor. Tribal witch doctors were looking for a sacrifice to regenerate the soil.

The tribe at a meeting decided to sacrifice the professors, who had come to its village looking for guides.

Though only two and a half years old, Fairfield University (Fairfield, Connecticut) is already offering, in the English Department, extension courses in the Art of Advanced Composition, English Drama, and Playwriting.

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## TWAYNE EDITIONS: Modern Poets

## "WE ARE READY TO LOSE SOME MONEY"

*Poetry Magazine* recently published a symposium on the problems of poetry publication. The many pages of that symposium could be summed up in one sentiment uttered in one way or another by each of the participants: "If only 'the poetry lovers' would buy poetry!"

## NEITHER PROTOCOL NOR PRECEDENT

This issue of *THE CRITIC* is to be regarded neither as adhering strictly to prescribed protocol, nor as setting a new precedent, from which, henceforth, few or no deviations are to be made.

Variety, flexibility, adaptability—these are first principles of our Association; and they are likewise the essential modes of *THE CRITIC*. What the February issue will be like is still a big question mark. Yet one thing is certain: it will be no mere mechanical duplicate of the present number.

I don't know whether availability of publication has anything to do with the quality of poetry produced at any given time. I think it is true that the almost systematic indifference of the potential audience for poetry is bound to be reflected in the attitudes of the poets. Certainly the poet cannot long be expected to show any concern for an audience that shows no concern for his work. One writes for a reader, however remotely defined that reader may be in the poet's mind. And it is my impression that the poets generally are far more capable than their readers.

Some mixture of these notions was in my head when I wrote an article some time ago for *Poetry Magazine's* annual supplement to the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. I proposed that the only valuable publisher of poetry would be the publisher who undertook to assist the audience to a more immediate participation in the poem. A short while later, Twayne Publishers, then in process of forming a new firm, picked up the article and invited me to try out my notion. In effect they said, "You have some ideas; we are ready to lose some money." It seemed to me an ideal publisher's attitude. I accepted with pleasure their offer to lose some of their money for them. I can also add that I have been reasonably successful.

The specific plan of the Twayne Library of Modern Poetry is to offer a choice of the best available

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## MY HEARTFELT THANKS

The messages of congratulations and good wishes—and expressions of sympathy or condolence to the new *CRITIC* editor and C.E.A. executive secretary keep coming in. Let one stand for all the rest: "Good luck to you, Mr. Editor. We'll back you any way and every way we can and all the time." My heartfelt thanks to you, Clarence Thorpe, for this unreserved vote of confidence; and to all the rest of you who have given me the same assurance.

Maxwell H. Goldberg

poetry, and as an inducement, a book, *MID-CENTURY AMERICAN POETS*, a unique anthology of fifteen leading poets of the current generation with (in addition to a wide selection of the poem of each contributor) a prose statement of writing principles prepared by the poet. The contributors are Wilbur, Viereck, Shapiro, Delmore Schwartz, W. T. Scott, John Nims, Muriel Rukeyser, Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell, E. L. Mayo, John Holmes, Randall Jarrell, Richard Eberhart, Elizabeth Bishop, and John Ciardi. As editor of the anthology, I have been delighted by the statements prepared by these writers. They have made a rich and important book of poems, and of some of the best talk about poetry I have ever read.

For next year, along with a new list of poets, Twayne will offer as a bonus book *THE LIFE AND WORKS OF D. H. LAWRENCE* by Harry T. Moore whose edition of Lawrence's letters to Bertrand Russell won wide acclaim two years ago. In the future, we visualize selected texts of not sufficiently well known poets of the past, with prefatory analyses by recognized poets now writing.

Obviously, no publisher can find six epoch-making books of poetry a year. One generation would be a high average. Nevertheless, assuming a reader who has what Robert Frost has called "the weakness for poetry", Twayne believes it can find at least four titles a year that should be interesting.

These titles will be offered to subscribers at \$2.00 a copy in a regular book club plan. If as editor do my work well and can succeed in finding valuable manuscripts the subscriber to the Twayne Library should find it possible to maintain a reasonably good awareness of what is happening in modern poetry. That, at least, is an ideal goal.

John Ciardi

Harvard University

## Travel and Change

Lois Hartley (University of Illinois) plans to work and travel in the British Isles and continents Europe beginning with the second semester.

Cecelia H. Hendricks has a sabbatical leave from Indiana University this semester and is sailing on March 3 from San Francisco to spend the next six months on folklore research in the South Pacific. She plans to go to Honolulu first and then to farther islands, probably Guam and the Palau. She expects to work with a wire recorder, as well as getting stories set down by native school children of the islands.

Dr. Guy Cardwell, formerly department head at the University of Maryland, has become head of the Department of English at Washington University (St. Louis, Mo.) Dr. Charles D. Murphy is acting head of the Department of English at the University of Maryland.

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